

Remembering Lessons Learned: Knowledge Management Techniques for Building Generational Memory

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Presentation Summary

In 2006, the first wave of the baby boom generation will reach 60 years of age. Some may have already retired while others are nearing Canada's median retirement age of 61 (Mackenzie & Dryburgh, 2003). According to the 2001 Census of Canada, 54% of librarians were between the ages of 45 and 64, with the majority of these in the 45-54 age cohort (Statistics Canada, 2001). Canadian academic libraries should expect to see a large wave of retirements in the next 5 to 10 years.

Most of the literature on the aging demographics of librarians is concerned with human resource issues such recruitment, retention, and the loss of experience and expertise in the administrative and managerial ranks (Curran, 2003; Ingles, 2003; Law, 2000). One issue that is glaringly lacking in this discussion is how organizations plan to capture and reuse the knowledge and expertise of retiring librarians before they leave the organization. This is not just an issue of concern to library directors – it is of particular relevance to faculty associations and organizations such as the Canadian Association of University Teachers. What steps are our faculty associations taking to capture and share the vast experience of faculty and librarians who have been actively involved in negotiating our role in the academic enterprise? How will new hires learn the important role the faculty association has played in improving the terms and conditions of their employment? How can faculty associations improve their own performance and transfer lessons learned to others? The answer to these questions is knowledge management (KM), a set of techniques and practices that facilitate the flow of knowledge into and within organizations (Birkinshaw, 2001).

KM techniques such as exit interviews and storytelling can assist faculty associations in retaining organizational knowledge that is at risk of being lost as employees retire. Exit interviews are face-to-face interviews conducted in order to capture both explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge from departing employees (National Electronic Library for Health, 2001). Such interviews could easily be conducted with departing librarians who have played active roles in the faculty association. Storytelling is a useful KM technique that can be used to capture tacit knowledge and transfer knowledge to others. Stories can also be used to spark action, transmit values, foster collaboration, and lead people into the future (Denning, 2004). Other KM techniques such as After Action Reviews can help improve organizational performance by enabling organizations to capture insights immediately after an event (such as a negotiating session) and to quickly transfer lessons learned to others.

By adopting knowledge management practices, organizations can leverage learning to improve organizational performance (Cross & Baird, 2000). Valuable knowledge acquired through years of experience will not be lost as librarians and faculty leave the workforce. Faculty associations will be able to quickly adapt and learn by embedding knowledge management practices into a variety of processes including collective bargaining, grievance handling, and other activities.

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<http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/products/standard/themes/ListProducts.cfm?Temporal=2001&APATH=3&THEME=46&FREE=0>

Recommended Reading

Books on Knowledge Management

Collison, C. & Parcell, G. (2004) *Learning to fly: practical knowledge management from some of the world's leading learning organizations. Second Edition*. Chichester, Capstone Publishing.

Provides an overview of knowledge management and presents a holistic model of KM. Includes a variety of tools and techniques to connect sharers with learners including peer assists, learning whilst doing, and learning after doing. It also discusses networking, communities of practice, capturing knowledge, and ways to embed knowledge sharing in organizations.

Davenport, T. H. & Prusak, L. (1998) *Working knowledge: how organizations manage what they know*. Boston, Harvard Business School Press.

Discusses knowledge markets, how knowledge is generated, how to codify knowledge, how to transfer knowledge, knowledge roles and skills, and technologies for knowledge management. Includes a chapter on knowledge management projects and the pragmatics of knowledge management.

DeLong, D. W. (2004). *Lost knowledge: confronting the threat of an aging workforce*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Explains the high cost of losing intellectual capital and presents a strategic framework for action. Describes how to develop a HR infrastructure for knowledge retention and explores methods of transferring explicit, implicit, and tacit knowledge. Explains how to implement knowledge retention strategies including how to overcome barriers to knowledge retention.

Dixon, N. M. (2000) *Common Knowledge: How companies thrive by sharing what they know*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

Defines common knowledge and presents five methods of knowledge transfer (serial, near, far, strategic, expert). Discusses how to build an integrated system for knowledge transfer.

Rumizen, Melissie Clemmons. *The complete idiot's guide to knowledge management*. Madison, WI: CWL Publishing, 2002.

Provides an introduction to knowledge management and describes a number of success stories at companies such as Hewlett Packard and British Petroleum. Describes how to develop a knowledge management strategy. Discusses communities of practice, expert finders, intranets, and other collaborative tools. Focuses on the importance of organizational culture and how to manage change. Discusses how to develop KM measures.

General Articles on Knowledge Management

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http://www.iveybusinessjournal.com/article.asp?intArticle_ID=275

Hansen, M., Nohria, N., & Tierney, T. (1999). What's your strategy for managing knowledge? *Harvard Business Review*, 77(2), 106-116.

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Nonaka, I. (1994). A dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation. *Organization Science*, 5(1), 14-37.

Pfeffer, J. & Sutton, R.J. (1999). Knowing "what" to do is not enough: turning knowledge into action. *California Management Review*, 42(1), 83-108.

After Action Reviews

Baird, L., Holland, P., & Deacon, S. (1999, Spring). Learning from action: imbedding more learning into the performance fast enough to make a difference. *Organizational Dynamics*, 27(4), 19-32.

Darling, M.J. & Parry, C.S. (2001). After-action reviews: linking reflection and planning in a learning practice. *Reflections*, 3(2), 64-72.

National Electronic Library for Health (2001). After Action Reviews. *Knowledge Management Specialist Library*. Available online at:
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http://www.signetconsulting.com/downloads/aar_article.pdf

Communities of Practice

National Electronic Library for Health (2001). Communities of Practice. *Knowledge Management Specialist Library*. Available online at:
http://www.nelh.nhs.uk/knowledge_management/km2/cop_toolkit.asp

Saint-Onge, H. & Wallace, D. (2003). *Leveraging communities of practice for strategic advantage*. New York: Butterworth-Heinemann.

Wenger, E. (2004, January/February). Knowledge management as a doughnut: shaping your knowledge strategy through communities of practice. *Ivey Business Journal*. Available online at: http://www.iveybusinessjournal.com/view_article.asp?intArticle_ID=465

Wenger, E., McDermott, R. & Snyder, W.M. (2002). *Cultivating communities of practice: a guide to managing knowledge*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

Wenger, E. & Snyder, W. (2000). Communities of practice: the organizational frontier. *Harvard Business Review*, 78(1), 139-145.

Exit Interviews & Knowledge Harvesting

Holloway, P. (2000). Leverage exit interviews to collect key knowledge. *Workforce Online*
Available online at: <http://www.aboutpeople.com/PDFFiles/Pamexit1.PDF>

Holloway, P. (2000). Tips and techniques for effective exit interviews. *Workforce Online*.
<http://www.aboutpeople.com/PDFFiles/Pamexit2.PDF>

Holloway, P. (2000). How to protect knowledge from walking out the door. *Workforce Online*.
Available online at: <http://www.knowledgeharvesting.org/papers.htm>

Knowledge Harvesting Inc. (2003). *10 page guide to eliciting implicit knowledge*. Available
online at: <http://www.knowledgeharvesting.org/modules.htm>

National Electronic Library for Health (2001). Exit Interviews. *Knowledge Management Specialist Library*. Available online at:
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National Electronic Library for Health (2001). Knowledge Harvesting. *Knowledge Management Specialist Library*. Available online at:
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Storytelling

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Denning, S. (2000). *The springboard: how storytelling ignites action in knowledge-era organizations*.

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Snowden, D. (1999). Story telling: an old skill in a new context. *Business Information Review*, 16(1), 30-37.

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